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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the central role of effective communication in library leadership and how a leadership role in the library and information community can define and help establish an information infrastructure in our society. The opportunity for this leadership to exist in the convergence of libraries and computer centers is examined in a review of the report "Freedom and Equality of Access to Information" and documentation of the movement of computer centers and libraries toward each other within colleges. Particular attention is called to the Adler/Rodman communication model, the successful use of which would depend largely on effective communication between the two realms of libraries and computer centers. The discussion of this model demonstrates in detail the difficulty of communication in this interface situation and suggests that the librarian wishing to influence the computer center personnel must be sure that: (1) the message itself is clearly communicated without unnecessary information; (2) the message is coded in such a way that it will be decoded accurately; and (3) an appropriate channel is chosen. Additional viewpoints are presented on the challenge to library leadership posed by the merging of libraries and computer centers in the context of leadership toward an information infrastructure involving electronic publishing, communication, and leadership for the public good. (11 references) (CGD)

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COMMUNICATION: ESSENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP TO A PUBLIC GOOD—AN INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

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Communication: Essential for Leadership to A Public Good--An Information Infrastructure

Consistent with the calling of professionals, librarians have concerns which reach beyond the limits of their work. The agenda of ALA Council provide adequate proof of their interest in issues that reach beyond librarianship. Equal treatment for minorities and education reform are but two of the issues librarians have spoken on and actively pursued. The conception of librarians as leaders, then, can't be limited to leadership within the library. Effective leadership is equally important when librarians seek to influence those outside the profession.

Leadership frequently seems to be considered, or at least written about (Gardner 1987; White 1987; Zaleznik 1977), as a quality of a particular kind of person. A set of traits (the ability to envision, to communicate, to motivate) is used to describe this person. She or he is different from the rest of people whom the leader takes above and beyond generally accepted objectives. Yet, there is nothing about leadership that denies it to those in whom leadership traits do not predominate, that is, many who may not be perceived as leaders can lead from time to time.

This paper defines leadership as the ability to recognize a goal unknown to a group of people yet of significance to them, and, then, to influence the group to strive for the goal. It assumes that a broad range of people are capable of acting in this manner at times, so that most librarians can be looked to for leadership. Focusing on leadership outside the profession, it suggests that an opportunity for this leadership exists

in the convergence of libraries and computer centers. In describing this opportunity and what is needed to take advantage of it, the central role of communication in leadership will be demonstrated.

A Call To Lead

The report, Freedom and Equality of Access to Information (American Library Association 1986), calls librarians to lead toward several objectives which will contribute to broad access to information. Among these is the creation of an information infrastructure encompassing traditional information fields and the newer electronically based enterprises. This Access Report implies that the public good has been and continues to be served through formal and informal communication among the producers and users of print products, and states that these relationships must be duplicated with those who provide information in electronic forms:

> ...the availability of printed materials to the American public...requires an enormous complex and interrelated institutional structure, including authors, publishers, magazine and newspaper distributors, book wholesalers and sellers, book clubs, mail order services, and libraries. These are linked by impressive cataloging and bibliographic services and interlibrary loan and cooperative practices that have been built up over the decades. They permit the inquirer...to identify, locate, and usually gain access to any text desired from among the tens of millions that exist. If we are to be able to take similar advantage of the powerful new technologies becoming available to us, we will need to

> create a comparable institutional structure, linked by comparable bibliographic standards and comparable cooperative practices (p.16).

The LAMA task force charged to study and respond to the Access Report committed LAMA to lead in the creation of this information infrastructure. It recommends that LAMA assume:

> ...a leadership role in the library and information community to define and help establish the information infrastructure that will support our society in the near future. Important patterns of communication and cooperation for the public good among producers and acquirers (including libraries) of print products have not been established among producers and acquirers in the electronic market place. LAMA should assist its individual members in the American Library Association in creating this infrastructure by taking a leadership role now (Smith 1987, p.6).

Earlier in its report, the LAMA task force perceptively notes that librarians, for a number of years, have known of and considered the problems with which the Access Report dealt. Continuing, the task force states, "We are, however, coming up short of concrete objectives that could move us toward correction in improvement in many of these areas" (p.5). To put the task force's observation in more general terms, high sounding goals frequently go unmet for lack of leadership and a practical means for their attainment.

An opportunity and practical means to lead toward the creation of an information infrastructure exists in the convergence of libraries and computer centers. Computer center employees, as members of the computer/electronics industry, can both serve as conduits for messages from outside the industry, and also influence decision making within it. That is, if librarians can enlist the support of these people in developing relationships between more traditional information producers and deliverers and electronic publishers, a contribution toward broadening the information infrastructure will have been made.

Convergence of Libraries and Computer Centers

The movement of computer centers and libraries toward each other within colleges has been documented. The merger of the library and academic computer center at Columbia University is known to most (Turner 1986). In addition, Van Houwling (1987) observed that, "The convergence of university library operations and the university's computer resources is already becoming obvious at most universities." Also, Dougherty (1987) considers the growing relationship between campus libraries and computer centers and, after stating his belief that the merger of these two units is unlikely, agrees that they will be closely related.

This stronger and closer relationship between libraries and computer centers is likely to develop within schools and organizations with special libraries. Though evidence for this is not as available as for colleges, it is reasonable to suggest that it is occurring, or, at least, will occur, because of the similarities of the activities performed by libraries and computer centers. For example, computers are information processing

machines, a fact evident by their adoption by libraries. In addition, computer centers are moving to provide direct access to information stores just as libraries do. For instance, computer centers purchase machine-readable data sources and provide these to their users. Computer centers also connect their users with off-site data bases just as librarians are connecting their users with bibliographic data bases. Finally, libraries and computer centers are generally support services providing assistance to the primary functions of their organizations.

Since public libraries are more autonomous than college, school, and special libraries, this convergence is less likely and the relationship between the library and the local government's computing agency may not be as close as that in the other areas. Still, the use of computers by public libraries, and the similarities between libraries and computing agencies, will at least provide an opportunity for close relationships which many librarians will use to their advantage.

Librarians, then, can expect to be coming in closer and more frequent contact with the people who are responsible for and knowledgeable about computers. They will more and more deal with these individuals as colleagues involved in the solution of problems affecting their units. In this way they will be brought in close contact with the universe of users and producers of information in electronic form. Herein lies the opportunity for librarians not only to influence the computer professionals with whom they work, but also, to communicate the goals and values of librarianship to these individuals in their capacities as members of the

work force that creates, manufacturers, maintains, and operates computer technology.

Leadership Through Communication

The convergence of libraries and computer centers presents an opportunity to librarians for leadership because it provides the opportunity for librarians to communicate with computer center personnel. With regard to the extension of an information infrastructure to electronic publishing, librarians can demonstrate the need for 1) standards for electronically published information; 2) a widely accepted, simple method for identifying these information sources, and 3) a standard method of indexing them. In addition, broader library values can be made known, for example, quick, straight-forward access to information sources no matter where they may be, and free or inexpensive access.

Effective Communication

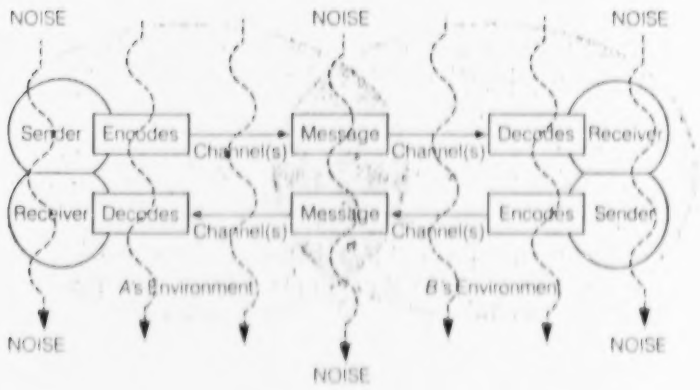
The communications model (figure 1) described by Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman (1985, 11-16) both demonstrates the difficulty of communication in this situation, and provides the understanding needed for success. As expected, the model includes a sender, a receiver, a communication channel and the message, and it identifies the activities of encoding and decoding. In addition, it recognizes that the communicators are people with unique experiences and attributes (environment), and it includes the interference which always exists when two people attempt to communicate with each other. Finally, by depicting each participant as a sender and a receiver, it illustrates that communication requires that the sender be responsive to the receiver.

In defining environment in this communication model, these authors note:

> By this term we do not mean simply physical location, but also the personal history that each person brings to a conversation. The problem here is that each of us represents a different environment because of our different backgrounds. Although we certainly have some experience in common, we also see the situation in a unique way.

The authors continue by explaining that the effectiveness of communication depends on the overlapping of these environments; successful communication depends on the similarity of the understanding and experiences of the communicators (p. 13-14).

Figure 1



In identifying interference, the model reminds the reader that elements seemingly unrelated to the communication process can hinder or even cause it

to be completely ineffective. They term these elements noise. After noting the existence of physical noise, they define psychological noise as, "Forces within the sender or receiver that make these people less able to express or understand the message" (p.14). Negative feelings of one person towards the other, and feelings of fear, aggression and hostility can give rise to this kind of noise.

Finally, the model shows that the sender must listen. The common perception of communication as primarily an active process is wrong. Successful communication requires more passive response than action, more listening than talking. Listening involves three activities; hearing the spoken message, receiving the non-verbal messages, and verifying that the interpretation of these responses is accurate. The verbal message must be heard accurately and decoded properly; non-verbal messages must be perceived and properly interpreted. In addition, each party to the interaction must periodically check to see that the message is being received accurately. The most common way this is done is by saying, "Is this what you mean?"

The librarian wishing to influence computer center personnel must recognize and be aware of each of the elements in this model. First, the message itself must be a clear one, unencumbered by unnecessary information and clearly understood by the person sending it. Second, the message must be coded in a way that will ensure accurate decoding; words must be used which are meaningful to computer center personnel. Third, an appropriate channel must be chosen. Given the superiority of face to face communication (i.e., immediate feedback, the non-verbal component, and the ability to

control noise), this channel is probably more appropriate here than written or electronically transmitted words.

Before the message is sent, however, consideration must have been given to the broader aspects of the communication model, the necessity of overlapping sender and receiver environments and the reduction of noise possibilities. Regarding overlapping environments, it is worth pointing out the extent to which librarians and computer center personnel differ. Despite the suggestion above that similarities between libraries and computer centers will bring the personnel in these organizations together, the differences between the two organizations, and between the personnel in each of the organizations, are more numerous. First, and perhaps the most important, libraries are long standing organizations with even longer traditions, while computer centers are recent establishments. The organizational climate of a long established enterprise will differ radically from the newly formed one. On the one hand, organizations which have existed for a long time will have many detailed, tested processes through which the organizations' goals are met. More recently formed units will, on the other hand, have few of these and, rather, rely on the development of specific methods for meeting specific aims or solving problems as they arise. In the first case, impersonal rules and regulations predominate; in the second, people and their ability to understand the new situation and develop and respond to it will be of more importance. Also, the missions of libraries and computer centers differ in that the former is well defined while the latter is consistently changing in response to new technologies and new opportunities.

In addition, other less basic but more numerous differences exist. Polley McClure (1987) quotes John R. Sack as writing the following. Librarians are struggling to incorporate the computer within their long tradition of consistency while computer centers struggle to develop some consistency in a context of constant change. Second, "The knowledge and skills base of librarians derive from professional training in the discipline of Librarianship which is reasonably stable and often incorporates a discipline-specific focus. On the other hand, there is no specific professional training for computer center staff. They usually possess some set of skills in an application or process area, but these are often acquired through experience in some other field" (p.5). Third, the two organizations have very different traditions of user fees; libraries usually offer their services for no fee while computer centers usually charge.

Pat Molholt (1985) points to other differences between these organizations and the people who populate them. Libraries tend to have a user-friendly orientation, highly structured files and collections, relative uniformity of access which generally requires little user training, and a high degree of subject expertise. Computer centers, on the other hand, have yet to develop fully the user focused service typical of library reference desks, and their services are frequently more difficult to understand and use by the client. This list of differences should be sufficient to prove the point; despite the similarities which have resulted in the convergence of some libraries and computer centers, the differences

between the organizations and between those who populate them are substantial.

These dissimilarities will, most probably, provide the greatest challenge to a librarian wishing to exercise leadership as the paths of libraries and computer centers come together. Differences in values, perceptions, goals and behavior will stand in the way. Thus, the librarian must make a special effort to bring the Adler/Rodman environments into coincidence by understanding computer center personnel and the situations in which they work before attempting to send difficult messages to them.

Continuing a consideration of communication with computer center personnel from the perspective provided by the Adler/Rudman model, the librarian must recognize and deal with the noise and interference which will hinder communication. While physical noise needs to be avoided, psychological noise will be more difficult because, being less obvious, it may not be recognized. Thus, librarians should enter into exchanges with computer center personnel with the understanding that, as people, they share with us uncertainty, a reluctance to change, and a pride in their efforts and achievements.

Finally, the librarian wishing to lead in encounters with computer center personnel must be a listener. Adler and Rodman (1985, 74-77) relate two telling experiments on listening. First, a study of business people demonstrated its significance; when the time spent speaking, writing, reading and listening was recorded, it was found that 42% of the time was spent listening. Second, a study of the in-class behavior of college students determined that, at randomly chosen times, no more than 12% were

hearing what the lecturer was saying. These experiments point to the importance of listening and the frequent failure to do it well.

Upon consideration, failures in listening are not surprising. Years are spent learning how to speak, read, and write while practically no time is spent learning how to listen. And so, particular attention needs to be given to this component of communication. The practices of asking questions (e.g., "What do you mean?") and listening actively (repeating the message in one's own words) both force the listener to pay closer attention and provide the opportunity to verify whether a message has been accurately received.

In summary, the statement that communication is necessary for leadership carries with it the implication of effective communication. Yet, as the preceding discussion should demonstrate, much is required for effective communication. The leader needs to give attention to and develop skill in each of the elements of communication.

Leadership Towards an Information Infrastructure Involving Electronic Publishing

The contention that the convergence of libraries and computer centers provides the opportunity for librarians to lead in the development of an information infrastructure, which will include electronic publishing, is not meant to imply that this infrastructure will develop rapidly and immediately from the efforts of individual librarians as they deal with their computer center peers. As the Access Report notes, the extension of the information infrastructure to electronic publishing is an enormous task that will stretch over years (American Library Association 1986, p.111). Rather, this convergence should be seen as an opportunity to develop an understanding of

the values of librarians, and an opportunity to begin the movement toward this infrastructure. As librarians deal more and more with computer center personnel, they can, if they wish, begin to convey some of the visions and values of librarianship to these people. In addition, when the chance arises, discussion of practical means for achieving these goals can be initiated.

In one way, it is the opportunity that is most important here. As the LAMA task force report reminds its readers, the statement of a significant goal does little to achieve it. Some practical means needs to be available so that actions toward the goal can be initiated. Since the practical means through which librarians can influence those outside the profession to seek goals of significance to librarians are few, each opportunity to do so needs to be recognized and then used to advantage. So, as these units come together, librarians need to recognize the chance to lead and take advantage of it.

Communication, The Language of Leadership

Leadership is much more than communication. The leader must first have vision, must recognize values and goals not readily perceived by others. Next, a leader needs to be able to move others towards some objective; she or he needs to energize, to motivate. However, communication is, clearly, essential for leadership; it is required if one is to communicate a vision or goal, and it is required if one is to motivate. This centrality of communication for leadership, then, requires that the leader's communication be effective. This paper suggests that this is both difficult yet possible since communication skills can be learned.

The fact that communication skills can be learned is another reason why communication should get the attention of librarians interested in leadership. The abilities to envision and to energize are, more frequently than not, traits of particular kinds of people. They are not skills that can be learned, but rather abilities with which one is born. Those, then, interested in improving leadership would seem well advised to pay special attention to communication, the aspect of leadership with which one need not to be born.

Leadership for the Public Good

This description of the opportunity for leadership presented by the convergence of libraries and computer centers, and of the importance of communication if librarians are to take advantage of this opportunity, is but one example of leadership for the public good. There are many goals important to society at large which librarians do perceive more clearly than most. Equal access to information, freedom from censorship, and the privacy of one's use of a library, are but three of these. Librarians ought to lead toward these goals, and effective communication will be required if they are to do so. An appropriate response, then, to those who urge greater leadership from librarians, and for those who desire to exert more leadership in the world outside the profession, is attention to increasing one's communication skills.

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